



SAVING REEFS WORLDWIDE EDUCATION RESEARCH CONSERVATION

2/28/2006

Blue Ribbon Task Force
MLPA Initiative
Submitted Electronically: MLPAComments@resources.ca.gov

RE: Comments on Draft Monitoring, Evaluation, and Adaptive Management Framework

Dear Chair Isenberg and Blue Ribbon Task Force members,

The Reef Check Foundation is a nonprofit environmental organization dedicated to the preservation of coral reefs globally and temperate reefs in California through research, education and conservation. We have reviewed the Draft Monitoring, Evaluation and Adaptive Management Framework and find the Framework to be comprehensive and we are pleased to see the importance of volunteer monitoring is recognized.

We recommend that the Framework further stress the need for a coordinated and cooperative monitoring effort and that partnerships be used to meet monitoring needs. Coordination and partnerships will not only ease the burden on CDFG but will directly involve a much larger constituency in the implementation, monitoring, education, and adaptive management of the new network of MPAs. The Framework should strongly encourage all parties actively engaged in marine research in the State to adopt, where appropriate, consistent methods of field surveys and data reporting. There are currently numerous groups collecting valuable marine data throughout the State. Unfortunately, due to the varying methods, diverse set of target indicators, and inconsistent data reporting formats, it will be difficult to use existing data to locate new marine reserves and evaluate their performance.

With respect to indicators, we are concerned about the proposed use of different indicators for different MPAs (p. 34). We strongly encourage that a consistent monitoring program be applied throughout the State that utilizes a statewide indicator list. While we recognize that distinct “species breaks” do occur, a statewide species list will facilitate the evaluation of species range shifts in response to do large scale impacts (*i.e.*, climate change) and will help promote a coordinated monitoring effort throughout the State.

The Joint Ocean Commission Initiative recently gave the Federal Government a “D” grade on Research, Science and Education citing, “[t]he lack of an integrated ocean observing system capable of providing decision makers with important information compromises our nation’s capacity to manage the oceans. The absence of an ocean and coastal stewardship ethic and sluggish effort to coordinate the public education and outreach activities needed to enhance such an ethic hamper support for reform and funding.¹” Employing a coordinated monitoring effort that incorporates a strong volunteer component will help the MLPA Initiative avoid these pitfalls identified by the Joint Ocean Commission.

Although in its infancy, the Reef Check California volunteer monitoring program is underway and we request it be included in Table 5 (p. 60) as a research and monitoring program in the study area. Specifically designed to support MLPA monitoring needs, the Reef Check California monitoring program

¹ Joint Ocean Commission Initiative (2006) U.S. Ocean Policy Report Card. www.jointoceancommission.org

has undergone rigorous peer review and we will initiate sampling this spring on the central coast. We are following the development and selection of alternative networks closely and we request your guidance as we develop and implement the sampling network so we can maximize the effectiveness of new sampling locations.

In addition to monitoring and education, we will use this program as a tool to coordinate existing sampling efforts. This will help address the challenges associated with data quality assurance and control outlined in the Draft Framework. We welcome any suggestion you have to further increase the efficacy of the program to meet the goals outlined in the Draft Framework and invite you to join us to participate in, or observe, one of our upcoming trainings this spring.

We wish to thank you for your tremendous dedication and hard work on this most important initiative.

Sincerely,

Craig Shuman, D. Env.
Director, Reef Check California Program